

Everyone Will Die by MicrosuedeMouse

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, Hurt/Comfort, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Jonathan Byers, Nancy Wheeler

Relationships: Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-08-01

Updated: 2016-08-01

Packaged: 2022-03-31 22:29:31

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,305

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Nancy has a lot of nightmares. One of them gets her thinking again about how fragile life is, and finally something inside her breaks. There's no time to waste on anything less than what she really wants.

Everyone Will Die

Author's Note:

Okay, I gotta get up in like five hours to go away for the week, but I'll probably write more while I'm gone. I didn't edit this but I'm like, 95% sure I didn't make any glaring mistakes. If I did I'll fix them when I'm back, heh. If you enjoy this and/or the other one I posted tonight, keep an eye out for more!

P.S. Title inspired by the Motion City Soundtrack song of the same name. Didn't inspire the story, exactly, but was in my head the whole time I wrote it.

Nancy gasped awake, sweaty and shaking. She'd done it dozens of times by now. It was almost normal. She would finally persuade herself to sleep, sometimes after hours of lying awake, only to dream again about Barb, or about the Upside Down, or about the monster. She would dream about more people disappearing, or about running through the dark forest in that terrible other place she'd gone, infinitely more frightening than their own woods at night. And then she would startle awake and lay in her bed, in the dark, alone save for some quiet music if she could bring herself to reach out from under the covers to the cassette player by her bed.

The first few times it had happened, and she'd been able to calm herself down enough to move, she'd tried calling Steve. On the occasions he was actually able to wake up enough to answer, he'd been less than helpful. It wasn't that he didn't try – he did. But he didn't really get it. He hadn't seen nearly as much as she had, and still didn't know the whole story; even what he had seen, and done, didn't seem to haunt him the way it did her. She chalked it up to denial. He tried to be comforting, but she didn't want to have to explain everything she'd been through, and ultimately the conversations led nowhere. She didn't bother trying any more.

Twice, on bad nights when she'd woken with a shout, Mike had padded softly into her room and curled up on the bed next to her. It was strange, but comforting. In the last few weeks the two of them

had had a kind of silent understanding. Both were grieving, both had seen things they could never forget, or even really talk about. Neither of them necessarily felt safer on those nights, but they felt less alone, and that counted for a lot.

Tonight was not one of those nights. She'd made no noise upon waking that might have been loud enough for her brother to hear in the next room. She laid awake, shivering, blankets pulled up to her chin, curled into herself and all alone with her thoughts.

She wasn't even exactly sure what she'd been dreaming about. Barb, and Eleven. Will, but not Will – the absence of Will. Barb and Eleven and Will were all gone, and so were a lot of other people. People from school. Friends. Family. Her baby sister. So many people were gone, and everyone left was living in fear.

The thing that scared Nancy the most was that now that it had happened once, her whole worldview had shifted. Who was to say it couldn't happen again? Who was to say something worse couldn't happen? The impossible had taken place in front of her and now there were no limits on life's dangers. How could a person cope with that? How could she live her life knowing that monsters were real and little girls could have superpowers and anything was possible and the pain of losing someone you love so much was so real and so harsh and so inevitable?

Nancy pulled further into herself, curling into a tiny ball under the blankets, thinking of all the people she loved. All the people she couldn't bear to lose now that she knew what it really felt like. And somewhere inside her, a wall came tumbling down, and she knew that there was something she couldn't afford to deny any more. And she resolved that tomorrow she would fix it.

-

The next afternoon Nancy crunched her way down the gravel driveway that led to the Byers household, leaving footprints in the thin layer of snow on the ground. Her jacket was buttoned tight against the late January cold, and her hands were stuffed deep into her pockets. She knew Will was with the other boys at Dustin's house that evening, and she guessed that Joyce must be at work, since only

Jonathan's car was in the driveway. Her stomach was in knots as she knocked on the front door, but she was determined.

It took a moment for Jonathan to answer. He looked surprised to see her. "Hi," he said, eyebrows raised.

"Can we talk?" Nancy asked.

"Y-yeah," he answered, opening the door further and letting her in. The house was pleasantly warm after her walk, and she hung her coat on the rack by the door and rubbed her hands together. Jonathan gestured to the couch, and the two of them sat down.

He watched her expectantly, and she tried to compose herself. There were a hundred places she could start. Finally, she blurted, "I have nightmares all the time."

Jonathan watched her carefully. "I do too, sometimes," he admitted.

She bit her lip. She had to go from that point now. Not the best place to begin, but it had just come out, and now she had to work with it. "A lot of nights I wake up scared after it takes hours to get to sleep. There's so much weighing on my mind and I'm not even allowed to talk about it. I can talk to Mike sometimes, but I can't tell my parents. Hopper made it pretty clear we can't speak to anyone who wasn't involved about what happened. So I just... let it fester, I guess." She looked at her hands. "I don't want to burden Mike with all of my fears when he's grieving Eleven. And he and I are only just learning to talk to each other again anyway. I certainly don't talk to his friends. I mean, we see each other and we share that look, you know, the one we all share with each other. The you-and-I-both-know-what-happened look. I don't really see your mom or Hopper, even if I would talk to them about it. And I barely even see you, really, certainly not in a context where we can stop to talk about it."

"If you need to..." Jonathan started, but he could see she wasn't done.

"And Steve... he tries to understand, but he only saw a fraction of what anyone else saw. Only did a fraction of what the rest of us did, even if it was, I guess, pretty heroic at the time. For some reason it

hasn't gotten into his head as much as everyone else's. Good for him, I guess, maybe he's not going to be broken forever." She sounded sad, and the tiniest bit bitter. "But it means he can't understand, can't even start to understand without me having to explain everything I went through, and that's the last thing I want to do when I'm looking for comfort."

"Of course," Jonathan said with a nod. He seemed content to let her speak, listening attentively, and she appreciated it.

"Last night I dreamt about Barb, and Eleven, and Will, and about them and so many other people being gone. God, I miss Barb so much, Jonathan. I don't know how to explain to anyone how badly it hurts. And on top of it all I can't tell her parents, I can't tell my *own* parents that she's dead. Everyone but the few of us believes she ran away, and I can never properly grieve her. No funeral, no grave to visit. I have to hide so much of my pain." Tears welling to her eyes, Nancy bunched her hands in her lap.

For the first time, Jonathan reached out and touched her, a gentle hand on her shoulder. "I'm so sorry, Nancy."

"After I woke up I was thinking about her. And about everything that happened. About how I can't be certain of anything anymore, and about how life is so much *more* damn fragile than I realized, because the realm of what it's reasonable to be afraid of just expanded so far beyond what I could have imagined. I know what it feels like, now, to lose one of the most important people in your entire life, and it's so terrible. I can't even explain it."

"I know," Jonathan said quietly, watching tears roll down Nancy's cheeks while she spoke. Gently, gingerly, he took her hand and squeezed it lightly. "I'm sorry Will came home and Barb didn't."

She gripped him hard. "I'm so glad Will came home," she answered, fighting against the tears. She wasn't done with what she had to say, and she was determined to get through it. There would always be more time to cry later. That wasn't what she wanted right now.

She swallowed hard and continued. "I was thinking about all the people I love who are still here. And more than ever I can't bear to

lose them. But at the same time, I can see how inevitable it is. So much can happen, and I can't stop it. Everyone will die." Nancy looked up and met Jonathan's eyes.

"That- that seems like a grim view to take," he told her, concerned.

Nancy shook her head. "No, it's something else. I think, realizing so... so *viscerally*, how fragile life is, as much as it hurts, I've also learned how *valuable* it is. Life is so short and I can't afford to waste any time. I can't settle for less than what I really want and I can't afford not to tell the people I love what they mean to me." She held his gaze.

His hand still clutched in hers, Jonathan found himself unable to look away from her. He wished he understood where she was going with this. "Nancy?"

She was quiet a moment, swallowing hard, trying to steady herself enough not to risk another sob or voice crack. Not now. "I broke up with Steve today."

A pause. "Oh," Jonathan said, still not one hundred percent sure where this was going. Then, a little lamely, "How did it go?"

"He tried to convince me to stay," she said, glancing away for just a second. "I think he really was hurt. But... he accepted it when he knew he'd lost." She looked back up. "I like Steve. Most of the time. But I don't want to be with someone I only like, even if he's really trying and maybe one day I *would* love him. I don't want to waste my time on that."

"Oh," he said again. "Well, that... makes sense."

"Jonathan," Nancy said. "The world is terrifying. So much worse than it was two months ago. And... I've known you my whole life, you know, but not well, until recently. And I wish that weren't the case. I wish I'd known you better so much longer ago. I wish it hadn't been something so awful that brought us together. But I don't think the time matters. I put a lot of time into Steve and it really didn't matter." She paused, bit her lip again. "I haven't had a good night's sleep in two months. But I know, from experience, that I would rather lie awake next to you than sleep by myself anymore." She

squeezed his hand tightly.

Jonathan searched her face. It was so damn hard for him to read her, not least because of how much he knew he wanted to see something in particular. Normally he could read people's faces or bodies when he couldn't make sense of their words, but she was a challenge. He doubted his judgment with her, because he knew it couldn't be objective.

"You and I shared a lot, even if it was only for a few days. And now I find myself missing you all the time," she told him. "I feel comfortable with you. And lately my favourite moments are the ones when you drop by my house to pick up your brother and for a minute or two we're in the same room. And I hate that I've wasted so much time when I knew how you felt about me, or at least how it seemed like you felt during those few days we spent together."

"Um," Jonathan said quietly, knowing now where this had to be going but still somehow doubting it.

"And I hope I was right about that, because I can't even believe how much time I've wasted leading up to it, no matter how much I needed to say all that, and I don't want to wait another moment," Nancy said. "Jonathan, I'm pretty sure I'm in love with you, or at very least a hell of a lot closer to in love with you than I ever was with Steve."

For a moment Jonathan's face was blank, while he processed all of this. It was a lot to take in. But then Nancy felt his fingers tighten around hers, and she knew she'd been right. Smiling a little, she leaned forward and kissed him carefully.

She felt him smiling into her, and just as she was about to pull back his free hand arrived at the back of her head, holding her gently. She smiled as well and kissed him again.

After a few seconds they pulled themselves apart, and she beamed to see that endearingly hesitant smile on his face. "Hey," she murmured, to break the silence.

"I'm a little bit in love with you, too," he confessed.

“Good,” she answered, smiling.

“I’m sorry I’m not always as good with words as you are,” he said. “I could work on a big confession if you like, but it might take me a while.”

She grinned. “That’s okay. You’re not half bad with kisses. I’d take more of those.”

The smile on Jonathan’s face was enormous and Nancy was happier than ever to see it. She let go of his hand to lift her arms around his neck as he scooped her close and kissed her again.